China:

US-PRC Technology "Exchange" Forum Hosted in Beijing

A Sino-American Technology and Engineering Conference (SATEC) was held in Beijing in October 2001 to exchange high-tech information in support of China's development, according to PRC media and Web site reports. The biannual event, cosponsored by a US-based nongovernment office and three Chinese Government offices, is credited by China's sci-tech community as a key venue for transferring foreign technology to the PRC.

The Fifth Sino-American Technology and Engineering Conference, a biannual gathering of PRC sci-tech personnel with ethnic Chinese engineers in the United States, began on October 11 in Beijing, according to information posted to the Chinese Technology Innovation Information Net (CTIIN) (www.ctiin.com.cn).

Organized by China's State Economic and Trade Commission, the State Bureau of Foreign Experts, and the China Association for International Exchange of Personnel, and cosponsored by the US-based Chinese Institute of Engineers (CIE/USA), this year's event reportedly drew more than 100 US participants from a broad range of high-tech disciplines.

According to the CTIIN Web site, CIE/USA engineers exchanged information with their PRC counterparts on the latest developments in telecommunications, advanced materials, energy, biotechnology, machinery, computers and software, and chemical engineering (www.ctiin.com.cn/gjhz/mzzg.htm). The event's PRC sponsors proposed 238 topics, which the CIE leadership used as a basis for choosing specialists to address the conference. Lectures were supplemented by "on-the-spot exchanges" with engineers at Chinese companies, the Web site said.

CTIIN describes CIE/USA as a nonprofit organization based in New York, whose approximately 10,000 members are distributed through six regional US chapters. Its function, according to a statement by the CIE/USA chairman and posted to the Chinese Web site, is "to continue strengthening connections between Chinese engineer associations in the US and abroad" while acting as a "bridge between the American and Asian cultures." CIE's close ties to the PRC's technological community are also evidenced in annual awards meted out by the US organization to top Chinese sci-tech figures, such as a 1998 prize given to the director of Datang Telecom for his "outstanding contributions" to the PRC telecom industry (www.china-window.com.cn/Shaanxi_w/dtwww/gsxw.news.htm).

Additional reporting in the Beijing China Daily on October 25, the Internet version of China's official English language newspaper, on the SATEC event quoted one member of the CIE delegation recommending that China purchase insolvent US technology startups to "cash in on their research capabilities and talents as a short-cut to meeting global competition."

SATEC has a "significant impact" on China's technological progress and is "taken quite seriously" by China's top political leaders, according to the CTIIN Web site (October 24 01). Past conferences were attended by Communist Party leader Jiang Zemin and NPC Chairman Li Peng, who spoke highly of the event. At this year's gathering, State Economic and Trade Commission Minister Li Rongrong reportedly credited CIE/USA as "instrumental" in helping China solve key technological problems, calling it a "critical venue for absorbing the intellectual resources of overseas Chinese" and an "important forum for supporting the fatherland's economic and technological development."

Comment: China's use of SATEC as a technology transfer venue is one aspect of a multifaceted program, orchestrated in Beijing, to promote "overseas Chinese" support for PRC high-technology development. While many ethnic Chinese targeted for recruitment are unreturned PRC students, others are later-generation Chinese-American citizens, particularly those with S&T backgrounds. Beijing recently adopted what it calls a "flexible circulation" or "two bases" strategy to encourage ethnic Chinese scientists living abroad to pass along information on S&T developments to China "in real time."

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